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ABSTRACT

Although college faculty often complain about class attendance, little data are available on why students miss classes and especially why absences are more common late in the semester. To explore this phenomenon, students' abilities to persevere in an academic setting and relate that to their actual attendance and performance in a college class were examined. Whether or not this type of motivation is intrinsic to the individual and her/his self-concept, or is it more situation specific was also explored. Students (N=140) in undergraduate college courses completed a questionnaire about academic perseverance and self-efficacy. Their responses were correlated with both attendance and performance in these classes. Analysis of the data indicated a significant correlation between class attendance and final grade in the course. Correlations among academic perseverance, self-efficacy, class attendance, and course grades were all fairly low. The low correlations could have been affected by range restrictions (in higher level courses there is typically little variation in either grades or attendance behavior). Since motivation may be a multiplicative relationship between self-efficacy and value, students may only be motivated if they feel competent to complete a task successfully. Suggestions for future studies are offered. The Academic Perseverance questionnaire is included. Contains 13 references. (RJM)

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Academic Perseverance, Class Attendance, and Performance in the College Classroom

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Abstract

Although college faculty often complain about class attendance, little data are available on why students miss classes and especially why absences are more common late in the semester. One hundred forty (140) students in undergraduate classes completed a questionnaire about academic perseverance and self-efficacy. Their responses were correlated with both attendance and performance in these classes. Although class attendance displayed a moderate correlation with performance in the courses, both perseverance and self-efficacy displayed only low positive correlations with performance.

Academic Perseverance, Class Attendance, and Performance in the College Classroom

Although college faculty frequently complain about poor attendance in their classes, there have been relatively few studies that have examined attendance. One study, by Baum and Youngblood (1975), examined attendance in a multiple section undergraduate accounting course. When attendance was compulsory, they found average daily attendance was 82%; however, when attendance was not compulsory, average daily attendance was reduced to 76%. Hovell, Williams, and Semb (1979) examined attendance in three sections of a child development class. They varied the use of weekly quizzes with resultant average daily attendance varying from a low of 59% in a section where quizzes were not used to a high of 81% in a section where students took weekly quizzes.

Beaulieu (1984) also examined attendance in three sections of an undergraduate course on personnel management that used bonus points or small prizes to encourage attendance. On days that attendance was taken, mean attendance rates ranged from a low of 70% to a high of 80%. Another study (Beaulieu & Sheffler, 1985) investigated the effects of rewards or punishment on attendance. However, neither rewards nor punishment improved attendance over that achieved during a base-line period.

Brooks and Rebeta (1991) examined class attendance in general psychology classes as it related to seating preference in the classroom. They found that students sitting in the last two rows of the classroom were more likely to miss class than those sitting toward the front. They also found that men missed classes more frequently that did women.

Although some classroom procedures appear to be able to affect attendance, it is still not clear why students miss classes. Galichon and Friedman (1985) examined correlates of class cutting at a metropolitan New York university and found that poor class attendance was associated with preferences for socialization over study, the enjoyment of drinking alcoholic beverages and taking drugs, and the tendency to leave studying to the last minute. Students also indicated that the most important factors related to class cutting included finding the class boring, outside employment, a dislike for either the professor or the class, or the belief that the class was unrelated to their future career.

Van Blerkom (1992) examined attendance in 17 sections of psychology and education courses. Students were also surveyed about the reasons why they missed classes. The results indicated the students attended classes more regularly early in the semester and less frequently later in the semester. These data also revealed that students reported a variety of reasons for missing classes including the demands of other classes, boredom, illness, and a busy social life. Further, the study found consistent moderate correlations between class attendance and course grades. Gunn (1993) also found a moderate correlation between class attendance and course grades in a first-year psychology course.

These studies provide some insight into attendance trends, attempts to improve attendance, why students tell us they miss classes, and how attendance relates to grades. However, they tell us little about why attendance decreases throughout the semester or why some students are able to maintain better attendance records than other students. One possible explanation is related to motivation, more specifically the ability to persevere in an academic situation. Clearly students vary in their abilities to stay motivated over a 14- or 15-week semester. Historically, psychology has viewed motivation from a variety of perspectives. More recently, self-efficacy theory has been used to explain academic motivation (Bandura, 1993; Zimmerman & Schunk, 1989).

This study was designed to examine students' abilities to persevere in an academic setting and relate that to their actual attendance and performance in a college class. Is this type of motivation intrinsic to the individual and her/his self-concept, or is it more situation specific? Is perseverance related to the students' efficacy beliefs? Furthermore, is this type of self-reported motivation related to class attendance patterns and to performance in classes?

Method

Subjects

Students (140) were recruited from two sections of Adolescent Development and two sections of Introduction to Educational Psychology during the spring semester of 1995. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 42 with a median age of 20. They also ranged in class standing from first year to post-graduates, but were primarily sophomores and juniors.

Procedures

The Academic Perseverance Questionnaire was administered early in the semester to students enrolled in Adolescent Development and Introduction to Educational Psychology. The questionnaire contained 21 five-point Likert-type items designed to assess the students' behaviors related to perseverance in academic settings. It also contained nine additional five-point Likert-type items, taken from Pintrich and DeGroot (1990), measuring self-efficacy for the class for which the student was enrolled.

Results and Discussion

Preliminary analysis of these data indicated a significant correlation between class attendance and final grade in the courses, $r = .46$, $p < .001$. However, the other correlations among academic perseverance, self-efficacy, class attendance, and course grades were all fairly low, ranging from .12 to .20. Multiple regression analysis using course grades as the dependent variable and age, class attendance, academic perseverance, and self-efficacy as predictors accounted for 24% of the variance.

As also found in several previous studies (Van Blerkom, 1992; Gunn, 1993), class attendance correlated with grades achieved in courses. However, measures of academic perseverance and self-efficacy added little unique variance to the prediction of course grades.

The low correlations found in this investigation could have been affected by range restrictions. In these higher-level courses there is typically little variation in either grades or attendance behavior. Repeating this study using first-year college students enrolled in large lecture classes, such as Introduction to Psychology, where larger variations in grades and attendance are typical may result in more substantial correlations.

Also, it has been noted (Woolfolk, 1995) that motivation may be a multiplicative relationship between self-efficacy and value. Students are only motivated if they feel competent to successfully complete a task and if they value the task. There was no measure of value in this study. Future studies should also include a measure of task value.

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TABLE 1

Correlation Matrix

(n = 140)

	Variable	2	3	4
1	Course grade	.46***	.12	.17*
2	Class attendance		.20*	.13
3	Perseverance			.20*
4	Self-Efficacy			

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

Academic Perseverance

Social Security Number: _ _ _ - _ _ - _ _ _ _

Gender (circle one): female male

Age (to your nearest birthday): _____ Today's Date _____

Class Standing (circle one): freshman sophomore junior senior graduate

PART 1

DIRECTIONS: For **each** of the following statements, circle a number (1, 2, 3, 4, or 5) that best represents your past or present behavior.

1 - This is not at all descriptive of me.
2 - This describes my behavior on rare occasions.
3 - This describes my behavior about half of the time.
4 - This describes my typical behavior.
5 - This is extremely descriptive of me.

1.	Once I start a project, I am highly motivated and work continuously on it until it is completed.	1 2 3 4 5
2.	I have a severe problem with procrastination (putting things off).	1 2 3 4 5
3.	In high school I was very diligent about completing my homework; my work was always completed.	1 2 3 4 5
4.	At home, I was always very good about completing chores without delay.	1 2 3 4 5
5.	I can remember times in my life when I never seemed to be able to complete tasks that I started.	1 2 3 4 5
6.	The most difficult thing for me is getting started on a project. Once I start, I find it relatively easy to complete.	1 2 3 4 5
7.	In college, I always make it a habit of reading text assignments before class.	1 2 3 4 5
8.	Although I get started on a project relatively quickly, my real problem is finishing the work.	1 2 3 4 5
9.	If given a choice between working on a project or watching television, I often choose to watch television.	1 2 3 4 5
10.	When I have a project to complete, I often remember other projects, chores, tasks, etc. that seem more important.	1 2 3 4 5
11.	I consider myself a highly organized person.	1 2 3 4 5
12.	I find it very easy to motivate myself to complete a task.	1 2 3 4 5

13.	Although I have a good history at completing tasks, I have to work hard at staying motivated.	1 2 3 4 5
14.	I tend to cram for exams.	1 2 3 4 5
15.	When preparing for exams, I typically spread out my studying over several days.	1 2 3 4 5
16.	When a term project is assigned, I begin working on it soon after the assignment is made.	1 2 3 4 5
17.	I usually start term assignments a week or two before they are due.	1 2 3 4 5
18.	I tend to think of myself as lazy.	1 2 3 4 5
19.	I can work hard on reasonable assignments, but I tend to procrastinate when I think that the instructor expects too much from me.	1 2 3 4 5
20.	I could complete assignments much more easily if I didn't have so many other important things going on in my life.	1 2 3 4 5
21.	I have difficulty setting priorities, deciding what needs to be accomplished first.	1 2 3 4 5

PART 2

DIRECTIONS: For **each** of the following statements, circle a number (1, 2, 3, 4, or 5) that best represents you.

1 - Strongly Disagree
2 - Disagree
3 - Uncertain
4 - Agree
5 - Strongly Agree

22.	Compared with other students in this class I expect to do well.	1 2 3 4 5
23.	I'm certain I can understand the ideas taught in this course.	1 2 3 4 5
24.	I expect to do very well in this class.	1 2 3 4 5
25.	Compared to others in this class, I think that I'm a good student.	1 2 3 4 5
26.	I am sure that I can do an excellent job on the assignments for this class.	1 2 3 4 5
27.	I think I will receive a good grade in this class.	1 2 3 4 5
28.	My study skills are excellent compared to others in this class.	1 2 3 4 5
29.	Compared to others in this class I think I know a great deal about the subject.	1 2 3 4 5
30.	I know that I will be able to learn the material for this class.	1 2 3 4 5

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